



Paddling the Big Thicket

The many miles of creeks, bayous, and river flowing through Big Thicket National Preserve make it an ideal place to explore by canoe and kayak. Village Creek and the Neches River are the two most popular waterways in the Preserve, providing many different trip options for paddlers of all experience levels. Canoeists and kayakers can explore these areas on trips ranging from a half-day to several days.

Village Creek

The 21-mile Village Creek Paddling Trail winds past beautiful white-sand beaches that are perfect for picnicking. Bald cypress, tupelo, and other tall shady trees line the creek banks. Several access points along the creek allow paddlers to make trips of varying lengths. Please refer to the Big Thicket National Preserve map for the locations listed here.

	<u>Distance</u>	<u>Approximate time</u>
FM 418 to Hwy 327:	8.6 miles	4 to 6 hours
Hwy 327 to Baby Galvez:	2.1 miles	2 to 3 hours
Baby Galvez to Hwy 96:	7.1 miles	3 to 5 hours
Hwy 96 to Village Creek State Park:	3.2 miles	2 to 3 hours

While generally very calm, Village Creek is a free-flowing waterway with no dams, so water levels can vary considerably. During low water levels paddlers should expect to encounter exposed sandbars and logs across the creek. High water after heavy rains creates hazardous conditions. Check water levels before setting out on your trip, and always wear a life vest.

Neches River

Big Thicket National Preserve protects 80 miles of the Neches River from Town Bluff, just below B.A. Steinhagen Lake, to the city of Beaumont. Distances between boat ramps vary from 10 to 40 miles. The river flows mainly through bottomland hardwood forests, with lakes and bayous more common further south. These provide interesting side trips, and many can be explored in less than a day without requiring a shuttle.

The Cooks Lake Paddling Trail begins and ends at the LNVA boat ramp, located at the end of Bigner Road in Beaumont. The trail goes up the Neches River into Pine Island Bayou and Cooks Lake, through a maze of bald cypress and water tupelo trees to Scatterman Lake, then down the Neches River to the boat ramp, making a 4.8-mile loop. It is easy to get lost in this area, so ask about maps and GPS coordinates for this trail at the Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center.

Paddlers planning longer trips may want to refer to the [Neches River User Guide](#), sold at the Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center. It provides maps, descriptions, and good information on the natural and cultural history of the Neches River area. The Visitor Center also provides a free brochure on canoeing the Neches River.

Camping

The Village Creek and Neches River Corridors are managed by Big Thicket National Preserve. However, the lands outside the corridors belong to private landowners. Please limit your recreational use to the waterways and sandbars, and never trespass onto private property.

Camping is allowed on sandbars along Village Creek and the Neches River. Free camping permits are required; contact Big Thicket National Preserve at (409) 951-6700 for more information.

Camping is NOT allowed in the following areas:

- Any posted as a Day Use Areas, including the Lakeview Sandbar on the Neches River;
- The Beaumont Unit and lands above the sandbars in the Neches Bottom and Jack Gore Baygall Unit during hunting season;
- The Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary above the sandbars;
- The Village Creek State Park day-use sandbar; and
- Any areas posted as private property.

Village Creek State Park in Lumberton has developed camping facilities. Reservations can be made by calling (512) 389-8900 or by visiting their website at www.texasstateparks.org.

Boat Rental and Shuttle Services

Local outfitters offer canoe and kayak rentals and shuttle services to paddlers and campers along Village Creek and the Neches River. Advance reservations are encouraged, especially in the peak season (early March through late October). Paddlers planning to use their own boats can contact an outfitter to set up shuttle service. The outfitters are knowledgeable about creek conditions and can suggest a trip to match your ability and available time.

Eastex Canoe Trails – 1698 U.S. Highway 96 South, Silsbee, Texas 77656
(409) 385-4700 www.eastexcanoes.com

Big Thicket Outfitters – 115 Connolly Rd, Vidor, Texas
(409) 786-1884 www.bigthicketoutfitters.com

Sharps Canoe & Kayak Rental – 8632 Billys Drive, Silsbee, Texas 77656
(409) 385-6241

Contact Information

Please contact one of the following agencies for more information on planning a trip to the Big Thicket:

Big Thicket National Preserve (409) 951-6700 www.nps.gov/bith

Village Creek State Park (409) 755-7322 www.texasstateparks.org

The Nature Conservancy, Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary
(409) 658-2888 www.nature.org/texas

Water levels: Village Creek: <http://water.weather.gov/ahps2/hydrograph.php?wfo=lch&gage=kout2>
Neches River: <http://water.weather.gov/ahps2/hydrograph.php?wfo=lch&gage=evdt2>

Emergency Numbers

Police, Fire, and EMS – 911

Hardin County Sheriff – (409) 246-5100
